Altering Tasks to Enhance Success

* *Make the task shorter,* either by reducing the amount of work required or breaking it into pieces with breaks built in along the way.
* *Make the steps more explicit.* The assignment, *Write a paragraph about . . .* may work for some children, but for those with executive skill deficits, additional structure and guidance will be necessary. This might include spelling out the steps to analyze and solve math problems, providing “cheat sheets” or templates.
* *Make the task closed ended.* Open-ended tasks cam be overwhelming for youngsters with executive skill deficits. They require too much planning, too many choices, or simply too much time to complete. Ways to make tasks close ended include using fill-in-the-blank tests, or allowing children to practice spelling words with magnetic letters rather than using them in sentences.
* *Build in variety or choice* with respect to the tasks to be done or the order in which the tasks are to be done. Have the child suggest ways to alter tasks to make them more interesting or more manageable, or let the child have some say about the order in which the day’s work will be completed. This can apply both at home and at school. Teachers might sit down with children at the beginning of the school day to make a daily schedule. Parents, too, often make a homework or chores schedule that gives the child choices.
* *Provide scoring rubrics* to define exactly what is to be included in class assignments. Parents can also apply this principle to home responsibilities by telling their child, “I will know your room is clean when the dirty clothes are put in the laundry, when the clean clothes are in your dresser or closet, when your toys are in your toybox, and when your books are in the bookcase.” Better yet, these “steps to a clean room” can be written down in checklist form.

Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents; Dawson, Peg and Richard Guare; The Guiliford Press, 2004